DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 084 CS 507 677

AUTHOR Bodenhamer, Julia A.
TITLE Forensic Friends Voice a Helping Hand in the Community.
PUB DATE 1 Nov 91
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (77th, Atlanta, GA, October 31-November 3, 1991). Broken print may affect legibility.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Involvement; *Debate; Drama; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Persuasive Discourse; *Public Service; Social Change; *Student Volunteers; *Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS Drama in Education; Oklahoma (Bartlesville); *Voluntarism

ABSTRACT

Volunteers are those who find that they have the ability to change at least one other person's life for the better. Public service programs can be established within the forensics medium. Such programs as "Kids on the Block," which uses puppetry to teach about individual differences, can benefit from forensics experience. Dramatic expertise, persuasive and informative techniques, and impromptu speaking skills are all developed through the project. In Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Special Program on Theatre Lessons in Theatre Education (SPOTLITE) involves fourth and fifth graders in a 4-day introduction to theater education. Forensics students can fulfill many roles in the program, by working with the young actors and helping them collect props, apply makeup, and build scenery. The interpretation of children's literature is another avenue for forensics students who wish to do volunteer work in the community. Whatever the public service project, meticulous planning is the key to success. The time necessary for organizational tasks is a major disadvantage of a forensic social service program, and volunteer efforts add to the forensic director's workload. However, the rewards are priceless: giving young people the opportunity to make a positive difference in an evolving society. (Eighteen endnotes are included.) (SG)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED341084

# FORENSIC FRIENDS VOICE A HELPING HAND IN THE COMMUNITY

JULIA A. BODENHAMER
Professor and Director of Forensics
Bartlesville Wesleyan College
Bartlesville, Oklahoma

REACHING OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY THROUGH FORENSICS:
CREATIVE APPROACHES

Pi Kappa Delta Program
1991 SPEECH COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION CONVENTION
Atlanta, Georgia
November 1, 1991

CS507677

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Julia Bodenhamer

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Speech Association of America and the North Central Contest Committee in joint meetings conducted over 40 years ago established the following philosophical foundation: "Communication makes possible group living; and speech, as the chief means of communication, is the universal instrument of social cooperation and coordination."1 Similarly, education commissions generally agreed on four essential principles that embody the apparent connection between speech communication and the needs of students:

1. Students need to be educated for employment, for civic leadership, for participation in democratic activities.

2. Students need to be given the kind of academic training that will prepare them to understand and appreciate their fellow men, and to join in the common enterprise of improving the society in which all must live.

3. Students need to learn methods of investigation and research so that fields of knowledge will continue to be deepened and widened.

4. Students need to be given a basis to enhance their intellectual and aesthetic resources, to rid themselves of biases and provincialisms, to enrich themselves culturally.2

By combining these basic tenets, the next logical step toward the inclusion of appropriate programs is to consider the existing opportunities in both the curricular and extracurricular domain. For example, the state of Missouri defines the purpose of interscholastic activities as programs designed "to provide experiences having learning outcomes that contribute to good citizenship...To this end only can interscholastic activities be justified."3

Steeped in communication theory and bound to a speaking and listening audience, the role of one co-curricular activity, forensics, in the community is easily established. Students learn to reason, to evaluate, and to communicate in the classroom. By active participation in their respective communities, they become concerned, responsive, and cooperative citizens.4 Such efforts thrust forensic coaches and teams into the army of volunteers serving in America's social service system. Each year budget cuts seem to force all levels of government and even local school districts to reduce or eliminate vital programs and services. Meanwhile social problems have grown worse.5 In response to these

unmet needs, 89 million volunteers reported for duty in America in 1990.6 Among those millions are scores of teens working within programs developed by youth groups, churches, and schools including some forensic organizations.7 There are no gleaming pieces of hardware or sweepstakes points to be earned for the individual, the coach, or the team, but the rewards are shared equally by all those who participate.8 Today's volunteers are those who find they have the ability to change at least one other person's life for the better. They can, and do, make a positive difference in their communities.

Thus, there are many reasons, both educational and philanthropic, for establishing a public service program within the forensic medium. Realistically though, the most compelling rationale for such considerations is more basic--the coach's relentless quest for the most economical means to maximize student practice of communication skills in a friendly, non-competitive setting. Even heeding only this line of analysis, there is little doubt that such thoughts bear examination by instructors and directors of forensics everywhere. Volunteer projects can be generally assigned to three areas--new opportunities, established programs, and showcase events. Examples of each of these categories of community service will be addressed, though they will represent only one of the many options within each genre. Secondly, implementation procedures for such programs will be discussed, and finally, both the merits and concerns of the forensic helping hand will be analyzed.

The ability to communicate lies at the heart of any public awareness program. Persecution of children is just one example of the many ills that plague society. Over two million cases of child abuse are reported each year in the United States.9 Prevention programs exist in most locales generally administered by county health departments or state social service agencies.10 One prospective opportunity is entitled, THE KIDS ON THE BLOCK. The KIDS "are a troupe of puppets designed to teach children what it's like to be different."11 The style of puppetry performed is based on the Japanese puppet theatre, BUNRAKU. When translated literally, Bunraku means you can see, and one can see the puppeteers throughout the show.12 However, dressed entirely in black and standing directly behind a puppet the size of a two-year-old child, the puppeteer soon fades into the background, and the colorful KID puppets stand out. The sketches dealing with abuse explain the difference between maltreatment and discipline. The obvious intent is simply to inform abused children in the audience that they are not alone, that the mistreatment they have endured or are enduring is unreasonable, and that help is available. School counselors can offer the best advice for determining the primary classes to be targeted for physical and sexual

abuse performances. Initially, training for puppeteers should be provided by certified personnel. Students learn the mechanics of puppet manipulation and lip sync and memorize short dramatic sketches. Considerable time is devoted to the discussion of potential questions that might arise from the audience as well as the appropriate responses that should come from the puppets. Programs are then made available to schools and organizations in the area. Dramatic expertise, persuasive and informative techniques, and impromptu speaking skills are all developed in the course of this project. Forensic friends remain behind the KIDS and voice an awareness program that benefits the community. Students may not prevent any of the child abuse cases reported annually, but they might be able to assist a few young victims.

Similarly, dramatic skills can be directed toward a broader spectrum by involvement in education programs for intermediate children. School districts across the nation report cutbacks in many, if not all, special programs. Certainly, theatre education in grades K-5 is top on the list of potential budget cuts. To compensate, arts councils and little theater organizations have established local programs to address these needs. One such effort, organized by the Allied Arts and Humanities Council of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, is entitled SPOTLITE--Special Program On Theatre Lessons in Theatre Education. Fourth and fifth graders are involved in the project. Established in 1985, SPOTLITE is a four-day introduction to theatre education for students. Trained volunteer docents visit classes integrating the program into the daily curriculum. Students then take a backstage tour of the local community center complete with hands-on demonstrations of lighting, make-up, costuming, and set-construction. Ultimately, the group is treated to a short dramatic performance.13 Forensic students can fulfill a multitude of roles in this program. The opportunity to work one-on-one in the classroom with budding young actors and actresses is an especially valuable experience for all the parties involved. Collecting props, applying stage make-up, and building scenery takes on a new dimension and sense of importance when coached by a caring teen. A brief children's production, staged by the "forensicators" for their young charges, places the theatre in a more relevant setting. All of which lends itself most appropriately to the development of dramatic and interpretive skills among the forensic volunteers. Meanwhile, today's squad is nurturing the forensic teams of tomorrow.

Other projects exist in each community that are unique to the needs and desires of that particular area. Often individual contest categories become showcase events.14 One such program is the interpretation of children's literature. Elementary school librarians thrive on this type of

assistance. Award-winning books can be easily cut and performed as teasers for appropriate classes. Without the restrictions imposed at competitions, simple costumes and props can be utilized, and creativity abounds. Suddenly, books that previously received little attention are in demand, and miraculously, reading becomes fun for children. Likewise, church schools might seek opportunities to perform at youth rallies or before local congregations. Civic organizations are always searching for new programs and innovative ideas. Preparation is limited, and frequently, contest pieces can be delivered with little, if any, modifications. By matching institutional goals and community needs, everyone benefits from the results.

Regardless of the type of public service project one chooses to implement, the key to any successful volunteer program is meticulous planning. Begin by canvassing the area for the three suggested alternatives for student participation--existing services, new opportunities that can be developed, and traditional sources for showcasing contest skills/performances. Once the range of options has been outlined, the list must be narrowed to those that best fit individual needs and schedules. Scheduling is especially important in order to develop an on-going program that is reliable and dependable. Recruiting forensic squad members for service demands enthusiasm and devotion to the task at hand. Participation should be encouraged among all students--both contest veterans and novices, interscholastic forensic winners and losers.15 Training for team volunteers is the next step. The time required to complete this stage is directly related to the type of services to be performed. Professional help, as in the case of THE KIDS ON THE BLOCK, should be arranged. Eventually veteran volunteers will instruct new recruits insuring both quality and continuity. Details of the performance calendar and clear cut guidelines for workers and coordinators should be established at the onset of each academic year. Personnel changes and scheduling conflicts often necessitate annual planning sessions. An end-of-year evaluation is also a useful tool for projecting beneficial changes for the future.

Naturally, the time necessary for organizational tasks represents one of the major disadvantages of a forensic social service program. Volunteer efforts add to the forensic director's already burdensome workload. While service projects need not be annual affairs, some, by their very nature, suggest a long-term commitment in order to provide maximum efficiency and benefits to the sponsor. Ideally, "program activities should be designed explicitly to foster social responsibility and commitment rather than only individual development."16 Without the pressure of judges' rankings and ratings, the motivation to achieve excellence in performances must be constantly reinforced by coaches and

constituents. In addition, a few programs, the child abuse puppetry being one example, suggest legal complications and liabilities that could arise for the puppeteers, the director, and the institution they represent. Thus, the coach is, as always, faced with addressing the familiar questions of time, money, and accountability.

While there are these limited concerns for forensic participants, the advantages of voicing a helping hand in the community are endless. Even the fortunate directors of well-funded forensic programs might do well to consider social service projects. At the very least, the use of communication skills in community service lends practical purpose and definition to forensic activities. The puppetry program, for instance, while the most rife with potential problems, offers the greatest opportunity for personal development. Volunteer puppeteers have even, in a few cases, been abused as children and come full circle in the healing process as they help other similarly afflicted youngsters. The realization that any volunteer has the opportunity each time he/she performs to have a significant impact on even the life of a single individual is an awesome feeling. The opportunity to speak out on profound social issues in order to actually effect change is woefully lacking in the contest arena. Other programs bring literature to life for younger students or introduce future thespians to the creative theatrical medium. Once again the "forensicator" earns immediate gratification, a sense of self-satisfaction, and valuable developmental skills while performing before wonderfully receptive audiences. On a broader scope, public forums heighten visibility of the merits of forensic programs and the institutions they represent.17 Meanwhile students contribute to the general welfare of their communities and nurture a lifelong commitment to civic and social responsibility.18

Communication is significant to every aspect of man's development. Experiences gained by participation in co-curricular and extra-curricular speech activities justify the interscholastic forensic program. Community service is a natural extension of any existing forensic organization injecting practical social values into traditionally competitive events. The effort required to establish such projects can be as extensive, or as minimal, as the forensic director desires. The rewards are priceless--giving young people the opportunity to make a positive difference in our evolving society.

NOTES

1 Loren Reid. TEACHING SPEECH, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), p. 28.

2 Ibid., p. 29.

3 Ibid., p. 317.

4 Steven K. Schultz, "Whither Civic Education: Classes or Community Service," THE EDUCATION DIGEST, 56, (March, 1991), p. 60.

5 Phil Sudo, "The Need for Helping Hands," SCHOLASTIC UPDATE TEACHERS' EDITION, Vol. 122, No. 12, (February 23, 1990), p. 3.

6 Lauren Tarshis, "The Rewards of Helping Others," SCHOLASTIC UPDATE TEACHERS' EDITION, Vol. 122, No. 12, (February 23, 1990), p. 2.

7 Faye Rice, "Volunteer Work Better Than Beer," FORTUNE, 122, (July 16, 1990), p. 78.

8 Tarshis, "The Rewards of Helping Others," p. 2.

9 Leah Eskin, "Teens Helping Kids," SCHOLASTIC UPDATE TEACHERS' EDITION, Vol. 123, No. 8, (January 25, 1991), p. 19.

10 Barbara L. Bonner and Terri Gallmeier, eds., FOR KIDS SAKE: A CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION AND REPORTING KIT, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Printing Services, 1989), pp. 1-16.

11 Barbara Aiello and Elise Pritcher, THE KIDS ON THE BLOCK TEACHER'S GUIDE KIT B, (Washington, D.C.: The Kids on the Block, Inc., 1982), p. 1.

12 Ibid., p. 2.

13 "Local Students Meet Theatre," BARTLESVILLE EXAMINER-ENTERPRISE, January 30, 1991, p. 2.

14 Deborah Ballard-Reisch, "Let Us Entertain You: Service Programs for Individual Events," THE FORENSIC OF PI KAPPA DELTA, 74, (October, 1989), pp. 1-4.

15 Reid, p. 378.

16 Fred M. Newmann and Robert A. Rutter, "Community Service to Enhance Civic Responsibility," THE EDUCATION DIGEST, 55, (April, 1990), p. 35.

17 Ballard-Reisch, "Let Us Entertain You: Service Programs for Individual Events," p. 3.

18 Newmann and Rutter, "Community Service to Enchance Civic Responsibility," pp. 35-36.